



2 PROVIDING FOSTER CARE

Department for Children and Families Family Services Division, District Offices

BARRE - 479-4260
255 North Main, Suite 7
Barre, VT 05641-4189

BENNINGTON - 442-8138
200 Veteran's Memorial Drive
Suite 14
Bennington, VT 05201-1956

BRATTLEBORO - 257-2888
232 Main Street, 2nd Floor
Brattleboro, VT 05301-2879

BURLINGTON - 863-7370
1193 North Avenue
Burlington, VT 05401-2749

HARTFORD - 295-8840
226 Holiday Drive, Suite 32
White River Junction, VT
05001-2024

MIDDLEBURY - 388-4660
700 Exchange Street, Suite 105
Middlebury, VT 05753-1529

MORRISVILLE - 888-4576
63 Professional Drive, Suite 3
Morrisville, VT 05661-8522

NEWPORT - 334-6723
100 Main Street, Suite 230
Newport, VT 05855-4898

RUTLAND - 786-5817
220 Asa Bloomer Building
88 Merchants Row
Rutland, VT 05701-3449

ST. ALBANS - 527-7741
20 Houghton Street, Suite 211
St. Albans, VT 05478-2247

ST. JOHNSBURY - 748-8374
67 Eastern Avenue, Suite 4
St. Johnsbury, VT 05819-5603

SPRINGFIELD - 885-8900
100 Mineral Street, Suite 101
Springfield, VT 05156-3166



Project Family
103 S. Main Street
3rd Floor, Osgood Bldg.
Waterbury, VT 05671-2401

802-241-2780 in Waterbury
1-800-746-7000 toll-free in Vermont

www.projectfamilyvt.org



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PROVIDING FOSTER CARE

Did You Know That...?

- About 1,200 children in Vermont — from infants to teens — currently live away from their families in foster care.
- You can help these children and their families get through a difficult time.
- By becoming a foster parent, you could make it possible for a local child to stay in his or her own community and school.

About Foster Care

Sometimes children are abused or neglected and it is not safe for them to stay at home. When this happens, family courts transfer their custody to the Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF).

Some children, but most often teens, come into DCF custody because they've either committed a delinquent act or they are without or beyond their parents' control.

In all of these situations, the state needs to find safe, nurturing places for the children to live while they can't be at home. This is called *foster care*. While it is not a magical cure-all, it is a time-proven way of helping children and families in need.

Most children who come into DCF custody return home to their parents.

About Providing Foster Care

Foster parents open their hearts and homes to children in need — for a few weeks, months, years, and sometimes a lifetime.

They also:

- Help children to heal.
- Accept and nurture the children who enter their homes — unconditionally.
- Support efforts to reunite children with their parents.
- Support the parents through a difficult time.
- Provide the parents with time to focus on themselves and the work they need to do to be able to parent their children safely.
- Frequently provide children who cannot safely return home with permanent families. In fact, most children who become freed for adoption in Vermont are adopted by their foster parents.

Special Types Of Foster Care

In addition to regular foster care, there are also special types of foster care, including:

Emergency Foster Care

Emergency foster parents provide homes for children with little advance notice; they are often called after hours or on weekends. These placements are usually for a couple of days, but can sometimes be for longer periods.

Kinship Foster Care

Kinship foster parents provide foster care for relatives or for children with whom they share a family-like bond.

Legal-Risk Foster Care

Legal-risk foster parents agree up front to provide children with permanent homes if DCF determines that the children cannot safely return home.

Independent Living Foster Care

Independent living foster parents provide care for older teens. They are more like big sisters/big brothers than parents, guiding and supporting the teens as they move toward becoming independent and living on their own.

Specialized Foster Care

Specialized foster parents have advanced training and skills; they provide care for children who have special needs that require a higher level of supervision and more sophisticated intervention strategies.

Help children and families in your community. Become a foster parent!

“IT IS SUCH A REWARDING EXPERIENCE TO PROVIDE STABILITY IN A TEEN’S LIFE. TO SHOW THEM TRUE COMPASSION AND COMMITMENT AND TO WATCH THEM GROW INSIDE AND OUT. TO SHOW THEM THERE IS A GOOD WORLD OUT THERE WAITING FOR THEM AND TO EDUCATE THEM ON HOW TO MAKE APPROPRIATE CHOICES FOR THEIR FUTURES.”

9 STEPS TO FOSTERING A CHILD

Who Can Apply

- You must be at least 21 years old.
- You can be single, married, living with a partner, or joined through a civil union.
- You can live in a house or apartment, but you must have enough room to house a child.
- You must have sufficient income to support your family.
- Applications are considered regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or sexual orientation.

Who We Are Looking For

The children in foster care are all different, each with their own unique needs, desires, and interests. That’s why we need all types of people to care for them. If you can answer yes to the following questions, you are the type of person we are looking for.

- Do you enjoy being around children?
- Do you have a sense of humor?
- Can you treat children in foster care like your own? Can you stick by them through difficult behaviors and situations?
- Can you provide direction and structure in a nurturing way?
- Are you compassionate? Patient? Open-minded? A team player?
- Are you reliable, honest, and a good role model?
- Are you willing to ask for help when you need it?

“A FOSTER PARENT’S JOB IS TO TEND SOULS AND TO BE A MIRROR THAT ... REFLECTS THE GOODNESS AND BEAUTY ... WITHIN THEM ... IN A WAY THAT ALLOWS THEM TO SEE AND BELIEVE WHO THEY REALLY ARE.”

You must have a current foster care license to care for a child in state custody. The main steps to becoming licensed are described below, in the order that they usually happen. Keep in mind that the order may sometimes change.

STEP 1. Make The Decision

Becoming a foster parent will affect every aspect of your life. Some even say that it becomes a way of life. Because it is such a big commitment, one that will have an impact on all members of your household, everyone in your home needs to think about what it will mean to them and what adjustments they may have to make.

Most of the children in foster care experience some degree of emotional difficulty; some have special needs that require additional care and supervision. You will need to carefully consider the special needs and behaviors you feel you can handle. And you may want to limit the types of placements you are willing to accept — at least initially. As you learn more about caring for traumatized children and develop new skills, you may find yourself willing and even eager to take on more responsibility.

Below are some questions that can help you to make the right decision for yourself and your family. Don’t worry if you don’t have all the answers right now. As you continue through the process, you will encounter people who can help you answer these questions.

- Does everyone in our family support the decision to provide foster care?
- Are we ready for a change in our lives, routines, and future plans?
- Can we be flexible? What compromises are we willing to make?
- What do we have to offer a child? What time commitment are we willing to make?
- With what children can we be most successful? Does age or gender matter?
- Are there behaviors or special needs we feel unable or unwilling to handle at this time?

- How much supervision can we provide?
- Are we prepared to work with the child’s parents?
- Are we prepared to participate in long-term planning for the child, which may involve the child returning home, staying with us permanently, or going to live with another family who can provide permanence?
- Are we willing to work as a member of a team?
- What support and financial resources do we need to properly care for a child? What resources do we have? What else do we need? Is that help available?

STEP 2. Complete An Application Package

You will complete an application package that includes several forms, including one that gives us permission to request a criminal-records check on all members of your household who are age 16 or older.

STEP 3. A Licensor Will Visit You At Home

After receiving your completed application package, a licensor will visit you in your home to review the forms you completed and discuss issues such as how you became interested in foster care, the type of children you’d like to care for, your experience with children, your financial situation, your interests, the activities you enjoy, your background, and your family’s health. The licensor will want to talk to all the child-caring adults in your home as well as the children. The purpose of the visit is to help you and the licensor decide whether foster care is right for you. A typical home visit will last a few hours.

During the home visit, the licensor will also tour your home, including the area where the child will sleep, to make sure that it meets our licensing regulations. He or she will review the fire and safety regulations with you and let you know if there are things you will need to do to meet the regulations (e.g. install smoke detectors or buy fire extinguishers).

STEP 4. Attend Core Training

You must attend core training in order to get your foster care license. It includes 10 three-hour sessions, is offered a couple of times a year, and usually takes place in the evenings. It covers topics such as the impact of foster care on your family, the importance of birth families, working with the department and other agencies, child and adolescent development, and the importance of permanence in children’s lives.

As a result of the abuse or neglect the children experienced, their behaviors can at times be very challenging. The training will help you to understand the effects abuse and neglect can have on children and prepare you to deal with abuse-related behaviors.

Most people attend the training prior to getting their license and/or accepting a child into their home; some already have a child living with them by the time they attend.

STEP 5. We Conduct Background Checks

We will conduct background checks including, but not limited to:

- Any criminal history — for the applicants and all household members age 16 or older.
- Any substantiation for child abuse/neglect — for the applicants and all household members.
- Any substantiation for the abuse of a vulnerable adult — for the applicants and all household members age 16 or older.
- Any past-due child support payments — for the applicants.
- Any motor vehicle violations — for the applicants and all household members age 16 or older.
- Any past or current Restraining/Relief from Abuse Order — for the applicants and all household members age 16 or older.

STEP 6. We Will Assess The Information Gathered

Using the information gathered from the application package, home visit, and background checks, we will assess several factors to determine your suitability as a foster parent:

- **Your Personal History.** This includes your history of child rearing, employment, education, criminal behavior, mental health, substance abuse, and family functioning.
- **Your Motivation.** Why do you want to provide foster care?
- **Your Ability to Meet Children’s Needs.** Can you meet the basic, immediate, and special needs of children in foster care? What supports will be necessary to make it possible? Are they available?
- **Your Willingness to Work as a Member of a Team.** Do you understand the requirements of caring for children in foster care? Are you willing to work as part of a professional team?
- **The Physical Environment.** Is your home safe? Does it have adequate living space? Does it meet our licensing regulations? If not, what does it need to come into compliance?
- **The Potential for Permanence with You.** If it becomes clear that the child cannot return home, would you consider adoption?

Please note that any criminal history will be considered in light of how it might affect your ability to provide safe and appropriate care for a child — in the context of your current situation. We will consider the nature of the offense, when the offense occurred, the frequency of the offense, the age of the offender at the time of the offense, and any evidence of rehabilitation. Federal law, however, does not allow us to approve an application if an applicant has:

- A felony conviction for child abuse or neglect, spousal abuse, a crime against a child (including child pornography), or a violent crime, including rape, sexual assault, or homicide, at any time in the past; or
- A felony conviction for physical assault, battery, or a drug-related offense within the past 5 years.

STEP 7. Receive Your License

If you and the licensor agree that you are ready for foster care and you meet the licensing requirements, you will receive a license that is valid for up to 3 years. If the licensor concludes that you do not meet the licensing requirements, you will receive a letter explaining why you will not be licensed and your right to appeal the decision.

Step 8. Accept A Child Into Your Home

How soon you are asked to take a child into your home will depend on how flexible you are in terms of the age, gender, and special needs of the children you will accept. Keep in mind that the greatest need is for homes for adolescents, sibling groups, and younger children with special needs.

Step 9. Working With The Parents

Every year, hundreds of Vermont families struggle with issues that result in children coming into foster care. The parents might lack the resources or skills they need to be good parents; they might be struggling with substance abuse issues; or they might simply be parenting the only way they know how — the way they themselves were raised. These parents deserve our support, compassion, and help so they can get their lives back on track.

Working with, and supporting, the parents of children in your care is a vital part of your role as a foster parent. It’s important to keep in mind that most children do return home. And for those who don’t, their families remain a central part of who they are and how they see themselves.

“EACH CHILD HAS A SPECIAL SPOT WORTH REACHING, A POTENTIAL WORTH FULFILLING, A SPIRIT TO FIGHT FOR, AND LOVE WAITING TO BE GIVEN. THE EXPERIENCE IS TO BE TREASURED.”

What’s In It For You

- You could get the opportunity to:
- See a family come back together.
 - Help end the cycle of abuse.
 - Give back to your community.
 - Watch a child blossom and grow.
 - Help shape a young life.
 - Experience the joy of parenting — for the first time, or again if your children are grown.
 - See the positive difference you’ve made in the life of a child.
 - Experience an amazing feeling of satisfaction.
 - Learn and grow as a parent and a person.

“WHEN YOU GIVE ALL OF YOUR-SELF, YOU GET SO MUCH BACK IN RETURN. YOU GET TO KNOW THAT YOU’VE MADE A DIFFER-ENCE IN THE LIVES OF CHILDREN AND PARENTS. IT’S INCREDIBLY SATISFYING. THERE IS NOTHING QUITE LIKE THE FEELING YOU GET WHEN YOU SEE A FAMILY COMING BACK TOGETHER. AND YOU JUST KNOW IN YOUR HEART THAT IT’S GOING TO WORK.”

The Support Available

Financial Support

- You will receive a monthly stipend to help with the cost of caring for a child. The amount will depend on your experi-ence and training as well as the age and special needs of the child.
- You can be reimbursed for expenses such as transporting a child to family visits, meetings, and court.
- An initial clothing voucher of up to \$100 may be issued if a child comes into care without clothing and efforts to recover the child’s clothing have been unsuccessful.
- Children in care are eligible for free school lunches. Children under the age of 5 are also eligible to receive services and food from the Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) program adminis-tered by the Health Department.
- If a child damages your home acciden-tally or on purpose, you may be eligible to be reimbursed the costs of repairing the damage.
- If a child needs special items or has unusual expenses, there may be funds available to help.

Childcare

- Subsidized childcare is available if you work outside the home or if it’s author-ized because of a child’s special needs.
- Protective services childcare is provided for some children. The child’s social worker can authorize this service if he or she feels the child’s situation calls for it.

Medical Benefits

Children in custody are covered for medi-cal expenses either through their parents’ insurance or through Vermont Medicaid.

Training

In addition to the core training that you are required to take, you can also take advantage of training opportunities offered throughout the year.

Respite Care

An authorized respite provider can look after the child in your care so that you can take a break. All foster parents are allocated a minimum of 2 days per quarter (or 8 days a year) of respite care. Some children and families require more than this. You may use respite a few hours at a time, for a weekend, or up to a week or two.

Crisis Support

An Emergency Services Program worker will be available by phone to help you in case of a crisis — 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Peer Support

You will get opportunities to meet and network with other caregivers, including respite providers, foster parents, and adoptive parents.

Vermont Foster/Adoptive Family Association (VFAFA)

You will automatically become a mem-ber of VFAFA — a grassroots network of foster and adoptive parents throughout Vermont. Membership benefits include a newsletter, annual conferences, ongoing training and networking opportunities, and peer support.



About Project Family

In 2000, the Vermont Department for Children and Families joined with the Lund Family Center — our state’s largest and oldest nonprofit adoption agency — to create Project Family.

We are dedicated to:

- Finding parents for Vermont children in need.
- Helping parents and children access the support and services they need.

We envision a society in which every child feels safe, cared for, and part of a loving family. One where foster care is understood, embraced, and supported by everyone.

For More Information

For more information about becoming a foster parent, or to begin the application process, please contact the DCF district office nearest to you (see the list on the back). Ask to speak to the Resource Coordinator.

FACT SHEETS ON RESPITE CARE AND ADOPTION ARE ALSO AVAILABLE

1
PROVIDING
RESPITE
CARE

2
PROVIDING
FOSTER
CARE

3
ADOPTING
A WAITING
CHILD